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## WEEKLY REPORT



# THE SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

19 May 1965

INTELLIGENCE AND REPORTING SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE INTERAGENCY  
VIETNAM COORDINATING COMMITTEE

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State Department review completed

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ARMY and DIA review(s) completed.

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THE SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

(13 May - 19 May 1965)

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THE WEEK IN PERSPECTIVE

Premier Quat has now succeeded in carrying out military command changes which, together with the recent dissolution of the Armed Forces Council, are designed to increase civilian control over the armed forces. The military, however, seem likely to continue to exert significant political influence. The potentially powerful High Command, headed by General "Little" Minh, has been abolished, and Minh has been made chief of a reconstituted Joint General Staff subordinate to the Defense Ministry, which continues to be headed by General Thieu.

Meanwhile, Premier Quat is reportedly still planning a cabinet reshuffle, although the changes may occur on a piecemeal basis. Repeated postponement of the reshuffle may reflect difficulties of enlisting Catholic cooperation. The majority of Catholics do not seem willing to oppose the government openly, although they consider it Buddhist-influenced. There are nevertheless signs that mutual suspicions and hostility between Catholics and Buddhists are sharpening. The growing preoccupation of Buddhist leader Tri Quang with alleged Catholic obstructionism and plotting may foreshadow a new period of Buddhist restiveness.

Current Viet Cong activity suggests that the anticipated Communist military campaign during the rainy season is in its beginning stage. It is believed that, at least for the immediate future, the Viet Cong will more or less feel their way along, capitalizing on tactical advantages as they accrue, and government vulnerabilities and mistakes.

The Communists are probably continuing to assess their military capabilities in light of increased air support to friendly forces, but the initial shock of this development appears to have worn off. The Viet Cong are increasing their boldness as demonstrated by the number of large-scale attacks during the last two weeks. The slightly rising tempo of activities over the past four weeks also suggests that the Viet Cong are cautiously intensifying their military activities, which for the moment, are being emphasized in the delta and the provinces north and northeast of Saigon.

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## I. THE SITUATION WITHIN SOUTH VIETNAM

### A. POLITICAL SITUATION

1. A decree issued by Chief of State Suu on 14 May, following a meeting of South Vietnam's National Security Council, promulgated changes in the military command in accordance with Premier Quat's proposals for reducing the political role of the military. Under the decree, the High Command, with its position of a military commander in chief, was abolished and replaced by a Joint General Staff; the latter is resubordinated to the Defense Ministry, which replaces the former Armed Forces Ministry.

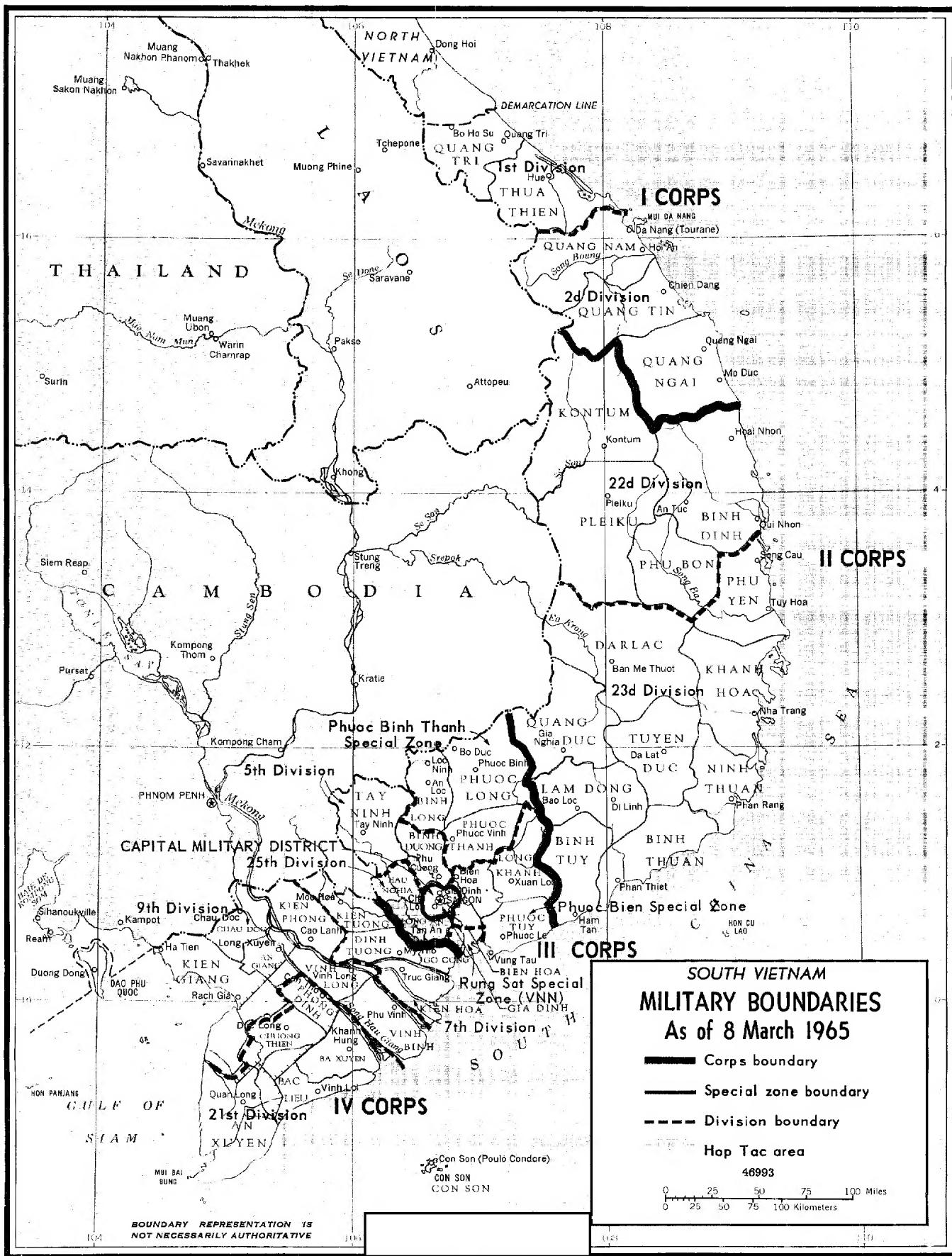
2. No new appointments were announced in conjunction with the command reorganization, possibly pending a formal announcement of expected changes in Quat's cabinet. It appears, however, that General Thieu is remaining as defense minister with increased responsibility, and that Acting Commander in Chief "Little" Minh will fill the new position of chief of the General Staff, as envisaged by Premier Quat. Continued delays in announcing the cabinet reshuffle may reflect some difficulties in lining up cooperation, particularly from Catholic circles, but at least some changes, giving native southerners increased cabinet representation, may soon be announced.

3. Although Quat has now succeeded in his plans to dissolve the Armed Forces Council (AFC) and to restructure the military command, there is little doubt that the military will continue to exert significant political influence. Reported comments of General Thieu suggest that he continues to aspire to greater power and he may be influencing Quat's reported intention eventually to remove General Minh even from his new downgraded role of chief of the General Staff. Air Vice Marshal Ky,

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who strongly supported Quat's move to abolish the AFC, now describes himself as concerned over the lack of a forum for agreed military action in the event of an emergency; Ky reported that he had consulted with the four corps commanders over possible steps in the event of new civil disturbances such as a coup attempt or a sudden step up of Viet Cong terrorism.

4. Signs of increasing religious tension continue to appear beneath the surface calm which has prevailed in such events as last week's peaceful commemoration of Buddha's birthday. Buddhist leader Tri Quang, in talks with embassy officers on 15 May, hinted at new Buddhist political restiveness. He claimed that the psychological lift from the air strikes against the North and the Viet Cong was beginning to dissipate, and predicted a rise of anti-American sentiment and pro-peace sentiment as the war continued to escalate. Quang's remarks, however, further implied that a major concern in his thinking stemmed from alleged Catholic maneuvers to regain power under the guise of anti-Communism. He charged that the Catholics were trying to raise private paramilitary forces, with US compliance, and that Can Lao remnants were still thwarting the revolutionary changes needed to win the populace away from the Viet Cong.

5. The embassy reports that, from its recent conversations with Vietnamese Catholic representatives, it does not now believe that the bulk of Catholics are actively ranged against the Quat government. The Catholics are themselves divided, but even the most influential group of refugees from North Vietnam, led by Father Hoang Quynh, does not appear inclined toward drastic action despite a conviction that the government is subject to neutralist-inclined Buddhist pressure. Quynh, who is anxious to avoid Catholic isolation, has been trying to create alliance with the Hoa Hao and Cao Dai sects and even the Buddhists, although he is moving away from elements associated with the Buddhist Institute. There are, however, some Catholic extremists who continue to show sympathy for condemned coup

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plotter Colonel Pham Ngoc Thao and appear to be offering him protection. Thao retains considerable potential for mischief, although he is not now believed to have the strength to mount a successful coup.

6. There are also some signs of pessimism in labor circles, particularly among the leadership of the CVT, South Vietnam's major union. CVT President Tran Quoc Buu has just weathered a challenge from a railroad workers' affiliate, but the rail union is still awaiting a wage increase promised it by the Labor Ministry rather than the railroad company. Plantation workers, who were expecting a raise under a new government regulation, have not received it and are talking of a strike. Buu himself, who recently spoke gloomily of the prospects for real social reform, recently underwent a court trial on charges brought by labor leaders whom he considers unsavory, but who appear to enjoy some official political favoritism. As a result, Buu, who is the country's best known labor leader in international circles, is currently threatening to withdraw as a South Vietnamese delegate to the forthcoming ILO meeting.

7. The Quat government continues to move ahead with its plans for provincial and municipal council elections on 30 May. An Interior Ministry official told the embassy that there were almost 1,500 candidates for the 471 seats to be filled, and that the councils would exercise greater power than any similar councils in the past, including approval of local budgets. He insisted that the elections would be countrywide, and that contingency plans have been made to deal with any local or major Viet Cong attempts to disrupt the elections through military action. The candidates reportedly have already been screened to eliminate neutralists and Communists. Meanwhile, there are indications that interest is growing in political circles over the need for an

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electected national assembly, particularly since dis-solution of the AFC has deprived the government of its formal base. Most officials seem to regard national assembly elections as infeasible in the present conditions of insecurity.

#### National Liberation Front Developments

8. Radio broadcasts by the National Libera-tion radio of the Viet Cong have publicized an emulation movement against the "US imperialists" launched at an alleged congress of military heroes of the Liberation army held in early May. Promi-nently featured in the broadcasts, in addition to a speech by Front President Nguyen Huu Tho, was a talk by a representative of the People's Revolu-tionary Party (PRP), an avowed Communist party which until recently has played in low key its stated role as vanguard of the Front. The speech outlined five points by which "we Communists must consolidate our stand" and exhorted Liberation fighters "to trust in and obey the party." The speech followed other recent statements issued by the PRP on the subject of the future form of govern-ment in South Vietnam and on the establishment of Communist-type organizations of control in the "liberated areas." The increasing assertiveness of the PRP suggests that the Communist party is increasingly identifying itself with the Front leadership and is less concerned with the fiction that it is merely one co-equal organization within the Front. The Front itself, has in the past month extended its claims to be the legal representa-tive of the South Vietnamese people in control of "four-fifths of the territory and 10 million people."

#### Economic

10. The Mission in Saigon has obtained Wash-ing-ton approval for the importation of 25,000 tons of P.L. 480 rice into Vietnam in anticipation of a GVN request. The GVN has not been able to counter Viet Cong interference with the movement of rice from the Mekong Delta to Saigon nor has it been able to prevent speculation by the rice merchants.

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On the brighter side, industrial production for the fourth quarter of 1964, the latest period for which figures are available, increased 13 percent over the same period in 1963. Also, despite adverse security conditions in rural areas, more than 17,000 farmers attended district level demonstrations on rice and vegetable growing in the first quarter of this year, and nearly 40,000 attended three-day farmer training meetings at the hamlet/village level in the same period.

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## B. MILITARY SITUATION

1. The Viet Cong maintained a high rate of violence during the past week despite numerically fewer armed attacks and some decline in other kinds of activity. The VC appeared bolder as they committed larger forces to battle and appeared to center their activity in the provinces around Saigon. The major effort occurred in the high ground north and northeast of the capital capped by a multi-battalion Viet Cong attack against the capital of Phuoc Long Province. There was a high incidence of road sabotage and attacks against lines of communications in III and IV Corps zones.

A Viet Cong force estimated at four battalions made an unsuccessful attempt to capture and hold Song Be. The Communists force seized and held most of the town throughout the night of 11 May but were forced to break contact with heavy losses (297 killed) on the arrival of friendly air and ground reinforcements. Viet Cong unit strength reportedly was low and a high percentage of the enemy were young and poorly trained. COMUSMACV reports that Viet Cong companies employed in the Song Be engagement averaged only 80-100 men.

Government military convoys were ambushed in Lam Dong and Long Khanh Provinces last week resulting in heavy friendly casualties as against negligible Viet Cong losses. Increased Viet Cong activity was also reported in the provinces north and northeast of Saigon and despite the Song Be defeat, may foretell future hit-and-run attacks in the area. Highways leading from Saigon to Vung Tau, and to Hau Nghia and in the vicinity of Ben Cat were temporarily closed last week because of enemy activities.

The intensity of Viet Cong actions increased in the Capital Military District, highlighted by a bold daylight attack against a textile mill. In

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the delta, the enemy maintained a relatively intense operational pace, capped by attacks in Bac Lieu Province and against the Hai Yen Special Sector commanded by Father Hoa in An Xuyen Province.

2. Government military activity was characterized by an effort to retain the initiative in the face of what appeared to be the start of an enemy offensive. The tempo of military operations remained at approximately last week's level although the number of large unit actions in contact with the enemy showed a slight increase.

There were three significant operations last week which included a rout of government forces in Binh Duong, a major GVN victory in Bac Lieu, and a successful defensive action thwarting a large enemy force bent on capturing the Phuoc Long provincial capital.

In Binh Duong, a friendly force was routed when a few rounds of friendly artillery fell short into forward government positions which, unfortunately, coincided with a bugle-and-whistle-blowing enemy assault. This caused a disorderly withdrawal with all major friendly elements leaving the field in defeat. In Bac Lieu, [redacted]

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[redacted] the Viet Cong were using prepared defensive positions. This information led to a ground/amphibious attack supported by effective air strikes and resulted in a major Communist defeat with heavy casualties. Viet Cong killed were reported as 178 compared to friendly losses of 17 killed.

3. Government and Viet Cong losses substantially increased this past week. Government forces suffered 1,019 (239 KIA) casualties compared to 704 (197 KIA) the previous week. Viet Cong casualties increased to 626 (468 KIA) from 458 (367 KIA). The government lost 381 weapons compared to 271 last week. The Communist losses of weapons increased to 227 from 127.

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C. RURAL RECONSTRUCTION

1. Refugee relief efforts continue to occupy the attention of the Ministry of Social Welfare and USOM in eight northern coastal provinces. Approximately 205,300 refugees are being supported by combined GVN, US, and third country assistance measures. The refugee population includes victims of flood and military action who have been re-located on a semi-permanent basis, some who have fled from insecure areas, and others forced to move by the Viet Cong.

2. Viet Cong terrorism against government officials at all levels continues, with village and hamlet officials bearing the brunt of the attacks. Statistical information for the month of April and since 1 January 1965 follows:

	April		Jan-April	
	Killed	Kidnaped	Killed	Kidnaped
Province Chiefs	0	0	0	0
Province Officials	1	1	15	2
District Chiefs	0	0	8	1
District Officials	0	2	14	21
Village Chiefs	0	3	14	10
Village Officials	9	3	53	27
Hamlet Chiefs	2	3	23	39
Hamlet Officials	14	81	73	264
Totals	26	93	200	364

3. Increased GVN emphasis on the vital population and resources control program was evidenced by a recent decree which brought it directly under the Ministry of the Interior. The Resources Control Bureau of the National Police has been upgraded to a service. In addition to carrying out the resources control program, the new service will plan, promote, and administer on a country-wide basis the identification card program and the family census and photograph programs.

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4. Psychological warfare operations in some units are being more closely coordinated with tactical operations. In the IV Corps area, the 7th Division in a recent engagement made good use of the psychological warfare weapons available to it.

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Approximately 800,000 leaflets were prepared and dropped, and three night time airborne loud speaker missions were conducted against the target audience.

The 23rd Division, in II Corps, has organized a mobile team of cadre to train sector Regional Force psychological warfare personnel. This plan has the active support of the division commander and is being closely monitored.

Peiping followed up its criticism of President Johnson with a strong denial that it was ready to make "concessions" on Vietnam or negotiate "on terms acceptable to the United States." In a broadcast of 17 May, Peiping bitterly attacked an article in the London Economist which reportedly claimed that the Chinese were willing to make a deal. Peiping claimed that "concessions, negotiations, dropping of any preconditions" were all simply means of allowing the US to continue its "aggressions."

North Vietnam responded to the suspension of air strikes with an 18 May Foreign Ministry statement which termed the suspension a "temporary" trick designed to hoodwink world public opinion about the "so-called US good-will for peace." The statement contrasted the stand-down with the continued US military build-up in Vietnam, and said it only paved the way for new US acts of war. Moscow and Peiping have reprinted the Hanoi statements, but have not commented authoritatively on their own.

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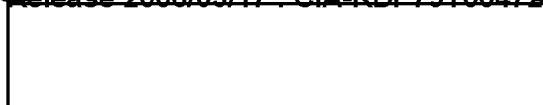
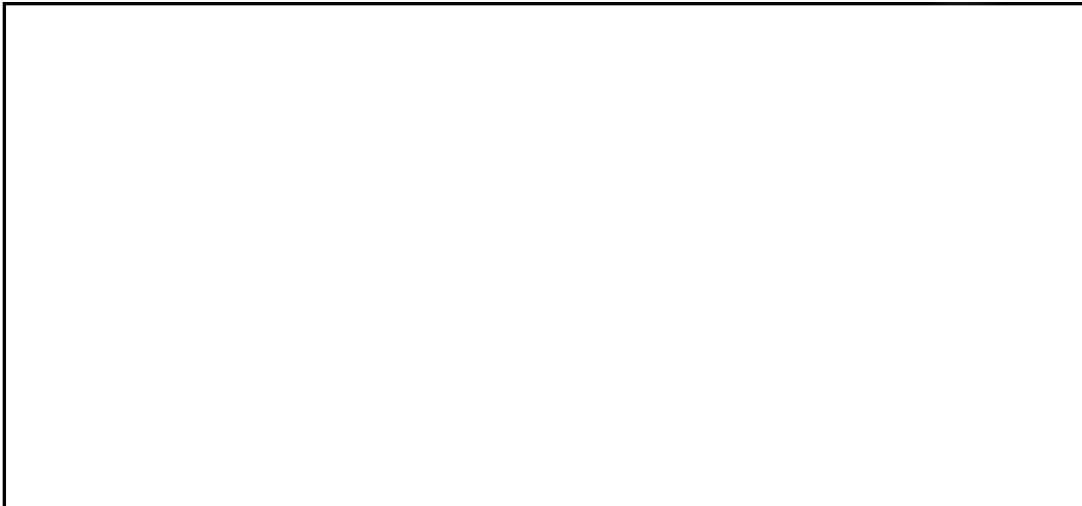
[Redacted]

2. Intra-bloc relations. The Soviets continued this week to give the NFLSV more attention. On 14 May, Soviet Party leader Brezhnev received the newly established permanent Front mission in Moscow. At the meeting, the Front representative expressed "profound gratitude to the CPSU and the Soviet government for the assistance the Soviet Union is rendering the Vietnamese people in their struggle for liberation." In addition, a Soviet news correspondent has, for the first time reportedly been sent into the "liberated" areas of South Vietnam to cover the war.

Despite the increasing warmth of Soviet-DRV relations, Hanoi renewed its open support for Peiping's nuclear policy following the second Chinese nuclear test. Public congratulations sent by the DRV leader characterized the Chinese nuclear accomplishment as a "very important factor in checking the aggressive and war seeking schemes of the US imperialists" and a "contribution to peace," which "strengthened the national defense force of the whole socialist camp."

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II. THIRD COUNTRY DEVELOPMENTSB. AFRICA

In the meantime, the Algerians have indicated that they could not receive an official GVN delegation until after the Afro-Asian Conference. The GVN goodwill mission headed by Deputy Premier Tran Van Tuyen visited Cairo on May 11-14. Tuyen called on UAR Foreign Minister Fawzi and other top officials and invited the UAR to send a delegation to see the situation in Vietnam. According to press reports, Tuyen also asked for the reopening of Saigon's consulate in Cairo. He is presently visiting the Malagasy Republic from May 18 to 20. Tuyen's planned visit to Nigeria was postponed until July but the reasons for the postponement are not clear.

C. ICC

In a letter to the ICC on 7 May, the GVN Liaison Mission stated that the DRV must bear the full responsibility for its aggressive acts against South Vietnam and that Hanoi's protests against defensive measures taken by the GVN, including air strikes against the North, are entirely unjustified. The letter also points out that the GVN has consistently cooperated with the ICC, contrasting Saigon's performance with the recent

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DRV expulsion of the ICC fixed teams, and that Hanoi's aggression and infiltration continues, giving some figures on recent Viet Cong terrorist acts.

D. OTHER

The semiofficial Vietnam Press Agency reported that the GVN will open a Consulate General in Colombo at an unspecified date in the near future and that Saigon will exchange diplomatic relations with Gambia. The GVN Embassy in Dakar will represent Saigon in Gambia.

E. FREE WORLD ASSISTANCE TO VIETNAM

1. SOUTH KOREA. On May 17 General Howze, CINCUNC, informed Korean Prime Minister Chong that he had received authority to release from his operational control 281 ROK Army personnel (an infantry company) to augment the ROK forces in Vietnam.

General Howze and Minister Counselor Doherty also took this opportunity to raise the question of the ROK providing two LSMs for use in Vietnam. Chong was informed that the US understood that the GVN Charge in Seoul had received a request for two ROK LSMs and would transmit the request soon. Chong promised to give consideration to the LSM request.

2. AUSTRALIA. A nationwide Gallup poll released on 14 May indicated that 52% of the Australians approve the Government's decision to send an Australian battalion to South Vietnam. Those disapproving totalled 37%, with 11% undecided.

3. NEW ZEALAND. On 13 May Prime Minister Holyoake made a major policy statement in which he fully supported and approved of US actions in South Vietnam. He also announced that the NZG had not as yet decided how it could meet South Vietnam's request for assistance. He rebutted Labor's opposition to military aid and Labor's suggestion of UN mediation by saying that in view

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of the internal problems its role was severely circumscribed. Meanwhile, no cabinet decision to send a combat unit (an artillery battery) to South Vietnam has been made. If it does so, Parliament will probably debate and vote on the question after it convenes on 27 May. Should the 20 May caucus of the administration party approve military aid to South Vietnam, the Government should have the necessary votes to carry it through Parliament.

#### 4. PHILIPPINES

On 12 May, the Philippine House of Representatives approved by a vote of 56-18 (one abstention) an administration bill calling for an appropriation of 25 million pesos (US \$6.5 million) to send an engineer battalion and supporting security troops to South Vietnam. Hearings on the bill began in the Senate on 15 May with leading administration officials strongly supporting military assistance. Meanwhile, Senator Ferdinand Marcos, the Senate President and the Nacionalista candidate for president, reportedly announced his opposition to the measure on 17 May, terming it a "virtual declaration of war." The bill will come before the Senate for vote about 20 May, where, unlike the House, administration forces do not exercise control and will encounter increased opposition. Press reaction to the bill has been mixed, with only a minority of the influential Manila newspapers favoring the dispatch of the approximately 2,000 Philippine troops to South Vietnam.

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### III. DEVELOPMENTS IN THE BLOC

#### A. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. The first SA-2 site discovered in the Hanoi area (15 miles south southeast) now appears occupied, according to an analysis of photography [redacted] Five launch revetments are covered with protective material and at least four revetments appear to contain missile associated equipment. The sixth revetment is unoccupied. The central guidance area is under protective covering. A possible missile transporter was sighted at one revetment and six groups of unidentified equipment were noted within the launch area.

Photography [redacted] revealed a significant increase in the number of MIGs in North Vietnam, and showed that construction was continuing on both the airfield improvement program. A total of 57 MIG 15/17s were photographed at Phuc Yen, another 4 were at Haiphong. The airfield improvement program now involves at least 7 DRV airfields. Hanoi's Phuc Yen continues to be the principal tactical base. Haiphong's Cat Bi airfield may be intended as a permanent jet-fighter base, but the construction at the other fields indicates that they are probably being improved mainly for use as dispersal and/or recovery bases. Photography showed that three of the six revetments at the second SA-2 site are about 75 percent complete. Construction had not yet started on either the service roads or missile storage revetments.

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#### B. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. Negotiations. Although Moscow has not yet made any authoritative comment on President Johnson's renewed call for unconditional negotiations in his 13 May speech, Peiping, Hanoi, and the NFLSV were all strongly critical. The Chinese called the appeal a "discredited hoax," while North Vietnam claimed it repeated "shopworn allegations full of contradictions and deceptions." The North Vietnam Party daily called the President's speech "only a

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maneuver" as the US prepared for more "aggressive" acts. A Liberation Front statement claimed that negotiations would be meaningless unless the NFLSV participated and unless all US troops were withdrawn. All three took exception to the President's references to Communist China's ambitions in Asia. Peiping said the President had "slanderously" charged" China with wanting to continue the war "whatever the cost to its allies." Hanoi called the reference a "divisive plot" and an "obvious attempt to split the socialist countries." The Liberation Front called it an attempt to "sow division" and stated that the Vietnamese did not need Peiping or any one else "to incite them to rise up to fight for salvation."

Moscow has not published the text of the speech nor officially commented on it. Initial TASS reporting noted that the President reiterated US readiness for "unconditional discussions," but made no mention of his suggestion that Peiping is a main stumbling bloc preventing talks from getting under way.

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